

## June 11, 2009 - Pelosi's War Bill Pitch Gets Personal

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Pelosi's War  
Bill Pitch Gets Personal

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Speaker Nancy Pelosi is fiercely lobbying fellow anti-war Democrats, crossing off the names of converts from a whip list, as she seeks to build support for a troubled supplemental war-spending bill.

Even with her leverage -- and there is no doubt the Speaker is the heavy in the party leadership -- the veteran California Democrat's task is tough.

The bill (HR 2346) is hamstrung by the inclusion of \$5 billion to support lending by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"She's working it, and she usually gets her way," said Defense Appropriations Chairman John P. Murtha, D-Pa.

"She's the most important asset that [President] Obama has," Murtha said.

Republicans are threatening to oppose the bill en bloc to protest the inclusion of the IMF money -- a possibility Democrats are taking seriously even if it may not be carried out.

On Wednesday evening, Pelosi was working the floor during votes on a separate bill authorizing foreign affairs funding (HR 2410), trying to find the remaining votes needed for the \$100 billion-plus war supplemental from among the 51 Democrats who voted against the bill when the House passed its version in mid-May.

Pelosi's hands-on effort to flip the votes of her liberal base is indicative of the difficulty Democratic leaders have had in bringing their caucus together in support of Obama's escalation of the war in Afghanistan. Some lawmakers say Obama has yet to show them a plan for success in that country.

Earlier this week, Pelosi approached Marcy Kaptur, an Ohio progressive who sits on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, and asked Kaptur to reconsider her "no" vote.

Rather than making a case based on the policy, Kaptur said, the Speaker asserted that Obama and congressional Democrats needed to clear the decks of "the last old business" left over from the George W. Bush administration.

Kaptur was not moved.

"I don't agree with her analysis that we're cleaning up for Bush," said Kaptur, who worries that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are too costly and that the administration lacks a plan for success in Afghanistan. "This is Obama's first chance. This is his first wave."

The conference report on the supplemental spending bill is not expected to reach the House floor until at least June 16, according to key Democrats. The leadership was confounded this week in its efforts to bring up the bill for a final House vote by a combination of vote-gathering, scheduling and policy-making complications.

**Anti-War Sentiment** Most of the Democrats who voted against the war funding bill in May are war critics. But for every Democrat that Pelosi has tried to entice with the IMF funding -- Financial Services Chairman Barney Frank, D-Mass., among them --there seems to be at least one more whose resistance is actually exacerbated by the IMF money.

Lawmakers say it's hard for longtime war critics to justify voting for ramping up U.S. forces in Afghanistan, no matter what other policies are included.

"I made a commitment to my constituents that I wouldn't vote for funding to escalate wars," said Yvette D. Clarke, who represents a liberal Brooklyn district.

In addition to concerns over the IMF funding, the measure's fate had been complicated by the insistence of Sens. Joseph I. Lieberman, a Connecticut independent, and Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican, that it include a prohibition on the release of additional photos of abuse of detainees in American custody.

Many liberals back the release of photos under the Freedom of Information Act, though the Obama administration opposes such a move. Rep. Louise M. Slaughter, D-N.Y., chairwoman of the Rules Committee, said the prohibition would not be included in the final legislation.

Democrats say they expect Pelosi, whose efforts are complemented by the official whip operation of South Carolina's James E. Clyburn and arm-twisting by White House officials, to get the votes needed.

Still, the process has been slow-going, and Democrats have had to cast a wide net to capture commitments.

Michael M. Honda, a California Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, said he has been contacted by a member of the president's lobbying team.

"I told people at first blush, 'No, I'm not changing my mind,' just to maintain some space," Honda said. "I'm looking at it."

Honda said the argument that has been pushed to him is that the president needs help. But he said he doesn't think the president's standing or momentum would be diminished by a "no" vote.

The House passed the supplemental, 368-60, on May 14 -- but that version of the legislation did not include the IMF funding.

Another reason some Democrats are still wavering may be because final touches are still being put on several provisions in the measure. Without a final product in hand, many lawmakers are reluctant to commit.

Conferees are scheduled to meet on Thursday.

The universe of potential vote-switchers primarily comes from the party's most liberal faction.

And even if liberals want to support Pelosi and the president, their concerns about increased U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq greatly restrict their support for additional funding.

Knowing that it will be tough for Republican leaders to hold the line against the war spending bill if Democrats eventually summon enough votes to pass the bill on their own, Kaptur made this pledge to Pelosi: "I said, 'I won't vote early.' "